

2/6/2009

Public Health Committee

RE: HB6265 An Act Concerning Speech And Language Pathology

Good Morning Mr. Chairman(s) and Committee Members,

I am Dr. Cathleen Alex, the President of the Connecticut Academy of Audiology. Audiologists are professionally licensed and specially trained to evaluate, diagnose and treat disorders of hearing and balance. I am here today to *oppose* HB 6265 *An Act Concerning Speech and Language Pathology*, a bill that seeks to strip the use of the term "diagnosis" from the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) licensing statute and replace it with "evaluation".

The current state statute defining a SLP has been in place since July 1974. It is well within the training and scope of practice of a SLP to use their evaluative and assessment techniques to make a diagnosis regarding a speech, language, cognitive-communication, swallowing and/or feeding disorder. SLP's are trained to refer appropriately for further medical evaluation and treatment by a physician if indicated.

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines speech, language pathologists as individuals specially trained to "evaluate *and* *diagnose* speech, language, cognitive-communication and swallowing disorders." ASHA is the professional, scientific, and credentialing association for more than 130,000 speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and speech, language, and hearing scientists. ASHA is referenced in the Connecticut professional licensing statute as the certifying body for speech language pathologists and accredits the SLP master and doctoral training programs in our country. Similarly, the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics defines SLP's as individuals who "assess, *diagnose*, treat, and help to prevent disorders related to speech, language, cognitive-communication, voice, swallowing, and fluency." It is certainly within the training and expertise of a SLP to make a diagnosis within their scope of practice.

The use of the term *diagnose* is not unique to physicians. The term *diagnose* is used in many professions including medicine, science, engineering, business, and many trades. An auto mechanic is able to diagnose an engine problem, a veterinarian a pet ailment, a plumber a water pressure problem, etc. Each discipline uses their unique training to make a diagnosis within their scope of practice.

A review of several dictionaries defines "diagnose" as: "to analyze the nature or cause of; to determine or distinguish the nature of a problem or an illness through a diagnostic analysis; the identification, by process of elimination, of the nature of anything."

To potentially strip the use of the term "diagnose" from the language in the SLP's statute sets a worrisome precedent for other professions and trades that currently appropriately utilize the word "diagnose" in their licensing statute. A review of Title 20 (the professional, occupational, licensing and certification, title protection and registration examining boards for CT) reveals that the Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) "performs acts of *diagnosis* and treatment of alterations in health status"; the clinical social worker may be involved in the "diagnosis and treatment of biopsychosocial dysfunction"; and the psychologist may "provide the assessment, *diagnosis*, prevention, treatment and amelioration of psychological, emotional or mental disorders". These professionals, like audiologists and SLP's, are guided by their unique training and ethical practice boards in making a diagnosis within their scope of practice on behalf of their patients or clients and referring to medical specialists as needed.

The Connecticut Academy of Audiology is *strongly opposed* to HB6265 and believes that "*diagnosis*" should remain unchanged in the current statute.

Respectfully,

Cathleen A. Alex, AuD
President